

Case 2691

Atheris Cope, 1862 (Reptilia, Serpentes): proposed conservation, and proposed confirmation of *Vipera chlorechis* Pel, [1851] as the valid name of the type species

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Abstract. The purpose of this application is to conserve the name *Atheris* Cope, 1862 for a genus of African tree or bush vipers. It is threatened by the unused senior subjective synonym *Chloroechis* Bonaparte, 1849. The name of the type species of *Atheris*, *Vipera chloroechis* Schlegel, 1855, is a junior subjective synonym of *V. chlorechis* Pel, [1851], and the valid specific name of the type species is thus *chlorechis* and not *chloroechis*.

1. In 1849, Bonaparte (p. 145, footnote) urged the prompt appearance of an unpublished catalogue by Temminck and Schlegel of zoological material in the Leiden museum. He briefly mentioned a number of the as yet undescribed species, including a new snake: 'In the Reptiles a new Viperine may be spoken of with great interest, constituting certainly an independent genus (*Chloroechis*, Schlegel) ... The green colour of this poisonous serpent from Ashantee [Ghana], as well as its forms, recall the Dendrophidinae, and make it, though a true Viperine, lead an arboreal life, and conceal its perfidious power among the foliage of the trees'. The name *Chloroechis* was listed by Neave (1939, p. 707) and by Sherborn (1925, p. 1243, where it was cited as a nomen dubium) and was correctly ascribed to Bonaparte, 1849 in both instances (Schlegel never published a generic name *Chloroechis*).

2. There were no species included in the genus, but subsequently Pel ([1851], p. 172) used the name *Vipera chlorechis*: 'Finally a sixth poisonous snake is found near the coast, *Vipera chlorechis*, which lives in the low lying areas on shrubbery. This species can be easily distinguished from the true tree snakes by its short thick-set shape and wide head' [translated from the Dutch]. In 1855, Schlegel himself published on the snake and, without reference to Pel, called it *Vipera chloroechis* (p. 317), recording it as a new species (p. 312). *V. chlorechis* Pel, [1851] is thus senior to *V. chloroechis* Schlegel, 1855 (as mentioned by Holthuis, 1968, pp. 25, 30–31), of which it is a subjective synonym. There is no doubt that Pel and Schlegel were referring to the same species.

3. The first volume of *Nederlandsch Tijdschrift voor Jagtkunde*, which included Pel's paper, is dated 1852. Holthuis, however, (1968, pp. 27, 30–31) cited the date for *V. chlorechis* as 1851; according to him (in litt. to the Commission Secretariat) the volume first appeared in monthly parts, the first 234 pages in 1851, the rest in 1852. Pel's paper (pp. 149–173) was apparently included in part 4–5 which was first published in November or December 1851.

4. The generic name *Atheris* was proposed by Cope (1862, p. 337) with two included species, *Toxicoa squamatus*, an unjustified emendation for *Echis squamigera* Hallowell, 1854, p. 193), and "Schlegel's *Vipera chlorocephis*" (sic). No type species was designated.
5. Boulenger (1896, p. 508) rejected the generic name *Chloroechis* on the grounds that it was not properly defined; this may well be the correct view, but it is better to put the issue beyond doubt. Boulenger adopted the name *Atheris* for the African bush vipers and he has been followed by all subsequent authors.
6. Loveridge (1957, pp. 159, 303) drew attention to the fact that *Chloroechis* Bonaparte, 1849 was a senior subjective synonym of *Atheris* Cope, 1862 and considered that the earlier name should be suppressed. He stated that *Vipera chloroechis* Schlegel was the type species by tautonymy of *Chloroechis* Bonaparte (an error as *V. chloroechis* had never been included in *Chloroechis*), and stated that the same species was the type of *Atheris* 'by monotypy'; this was also an error, but constitutes a valid type species designation (Article 69a(iv) of the Code).
7. Hughes & Barry (1969, p. 1030) drew attention to the original description of *Vipera chlorechis* by Pel in [1851] and selected specimen 1648 in the Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie, Leiden, collected by Pel from Butre, Ghana, as the lectotype of the species.
8. The generic name *Chloroechis* has remained unused, while *Atheris* has appeared in many faunal lists and revisionary studies; these include Bogert (1940, p. 103), Laurent (1956, p. 330), Perret & Mertens (1957, p. 597), Doucet (1963, p. 327), Marx & Rabb (1965, p. 182), Hughes & Barry (1969, p. 1030), Broadley (1971, p. 107), Pitman (1974, p. 221), Villiers (1975, p. 168) and Rasmussen & Howell (1982, p. 270). In the interests of nomenclatural stability I request that the junior synonym be conserved.
9. The International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature is accordingly asked:
 - (1) to use its plenary powers to suppress the generic name *Chloroechis* Bonaparte, 1849, for the purposes of the Principle of Priority but not for those of the Principle of Homonymy;
 - (2) to place on the Official List of Generic Names in Zoology the name *Atheris* Cope, 1862 (gender: feminine), type species by subsequent designation by Loveridge (1957) *Vipera chloroechis* Schlegel, 1855 (a junior subjective synonym of *Vipera chlorechis* Pel, [1851]);
 - (3) to place on the Official List of Specific Names in Zoology the name *chlorechis* Pel, [1851], as published in the binomen *Vipera chlorechis* (valid specific name at the time of this application of the type species of *Atheris* Cope, 1862);
 - (4) to place on the Official Index of Rejected and Invalid Generic Names in Zoology the name *Chloroechis* Bonaparte, 1849 as suppressed in (1) above.

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